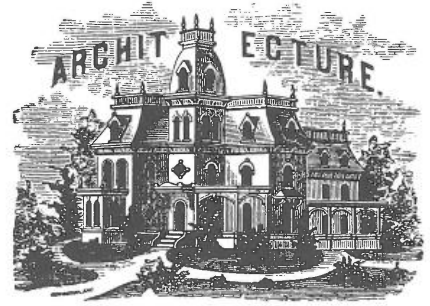


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



James H. Rand 1814-1883

Throughout much of the nineteenth century the City of Portland undertook several campaigns to regain its original status as the state capitol. One of these efforts led to the construction of one of the most grandiose public buildings ever erected in Maine, the Portland City Hall of 1858-1860. Designed by Boston architect James Hovey Rand, this substantial edifice was intended to house the state legislature as well as city and county offices. In size and pretension, it compared favorably with the other great Victorian municipal buildings of New England and symbolized Portland's importance as a city.

James Rand's career as an architect developed in Lowell, Massachusetts during that city's emergence as a major industrial center. He was born in Boston in 1814, the son of Gardner and Sarah Frothingham Rand. Moving to Lowell about 1833, he was first listed in the city directory in that year as a

housewright. Although absent in the 1834 edition, by 1835 young Rand was in partnership with another housewright, William Field, as co-owners of a sash, door and blind factory. In the same year he married Laurinda Moore. The 1836 directory recorded Rand as sole owner of the business, and this apparently constituted his principal occupation until 1845, when the city directory listed him as Lowell's first architect.¹

It was not unusual for early architects to combine their professional services with the manufacture of building materials. Lowell was rapidly expanding at that time, and it is certain that there was considerable work for an enterprising architect such as Rand. He is known to have designed the Third Unitarian Church in 1843, grammar schools in 1845 and 1849, the large picturesque County Jail in 1856, and alterations to the Market House in 1858.² Rand's most notable local accomplishment, however, was probably his own residence, which was completed by 1850. A perspective view and two floor plans of this stylish Italianate villa were published in *American*



Figure 1. Portland City Hall as published in *The Architects' and Mechanics' Journal*, New York, December 3, 1858 (MHPC).

Cottage and Villa Architecture, A Series of Views and Plans of Residences Actually Built by J.C. Sidney, New York, 1850. Sometime in late 1857 or early 1858 the Lowell architect relocated his practice to Boston. This was followed by his success in obtaining the commission for the Portland City Hall.³

In 1858 Maine's largest city had municipal offices in a market house designed by John Kimball, Jr. in 1825, which had been remodelled into a city hall by Charles Q. Clapp in 1832. With both the city and Cumberland County requiring additional space, suggestions were made to remodel and enlarge the County Courthouse, an 1816 building which was also the work of Kimball. The city engineer, Charles H. Howe, voluntarily submitted plans for the purpose, but his scheme was set aside in favor of holding a public competition.⁴ Accordingly, on February 7, 1858, architects were invited to submit proposals to remodel and enlarge the old courthouse. Plans were received from James Rand and Richard Bond of Boston, Alfred Stone of Salem, and C. H. Howe and J. S. Lewis of Portland.⁵ The city's two leading architects, Charles A. Alexander and Thomas J. Sparrow, did not participate.

The Committee on Public Buildings published a report of their decision on March 26, 1858. The Committee looked favorably upon the plans of Bond and Howe, but concluded that Rand's "...unites the greatest number of advantages, with beauty of design and convenience of arrangement..." It was noted that an initial fault in Richard Bond's scheme was the lack of space, "regarding prospectively the assembling here of the State Legislature — an omission which was a serious objection to his plan." Thus, the city was quite explicit in its desire to construct a building which would be suitable for the state capitol.⁶ By May the Committee had gone a step further by having Rand prepare plans for a new structure. On June 9, they adopted a new front elevation, "...which is a building in a fine style of Italianate architecture, with an elegant dome..."⁷ This, undoubtedly, was the design which was constructed (Figure 1).

James Rand's Portland City Hall provides an interesting example of how an architect could use his knowledge of historic architecture to provide a point of departure for a new design. It is evident that the Horse Guards Palace in London by William Kent served as a model. Kent's 1747 Georgian classicism would not, of course, have been acceptable in 1858, so Rand created a fashionable Italian Renaissance exterior. The principal elevation, 130 feet fronting Congress Street, featured cut stone, tall Florentine windows, and an elaborate cornice with balustrade. It was constructed entirely of Albert freestone, an olive drab sandstone from New Brunswick. As was

observed at the time, this stone was more durable than the Connecticut brownstone, which was so popular for houses such as Ruggles Sylvester Morse's mansion, then about to be erected on Danforth Street. The side elevations, 221 feet long, were built of pressed brick with sandstone trim. Interior brick fire walls and a slate roof indicate that little was spared in expense to produce a solidly constructed building.⁸

Work began in the summer of 1858, and a local paper pointedly observed that there would be space not only for city government, the courts, and county offices, but, "more room to spare than is found in the present State House at Augusta".⁹ The city hall was dedicated in September, 1859, but the lantern and dome remained unfinished for another year (Figure 2). On February 17, 1860 the city offered use of the new building to the state legislature. It was noted in Augusta that, "The Portland papers have commenced their annual agitation of the seat of government question." The *Gardiner Home Journal* commented that the move to Portland was only a matter of time.¹⁰

The state capitol, however, remained in Augusta. Those who opposed the move must have congratulated themselves on their judgement when the palatial city hall was gutted in the Great Fire of July 4, 1866 (Figure 3). With only the exterior shell still standing, local architect Francis H. Fassett was engaged to supervise reconstruction. Although the original exterior was retained, Fassett designed a smaller lantern and dome on a square base which was more Baroque in character (Figure 4).

This change must have been especially frustrating to James Rand, who was in Portland at the time to design the new Canal National Bank in the burned district (Figure 5). Located on Middle Street in a block of stores, this structure was completed in 1867.¹¹ The bank had a mansard roof and was faced with mastic scored to imitate cut stone. A relatively small structure, the Canal Bank was typical of the elegant French-inspired architecture that was especially popular in Boston. Heavy balustrades and a carved wooden Phoenix, symbolizing Portland's rebirth, were the most distinctive features of Rand's design.

These two projects constitute James Rand's only known work in Maine. The rebuilt city hall burned again in 1908 and was replaced by the existing structure designed by Carrere & Hastings of New York. The Canal Bank was completely remodelled by the Portland architect John P. Thomas in 1930. Rand continued to practice in Boston but apparently moved back to Lowell shortly before his death on September 6, 1883.¹²

Roger G. Reed
April, 1987



Figure 2. Portland City Hall, 1865 view (MHPC).

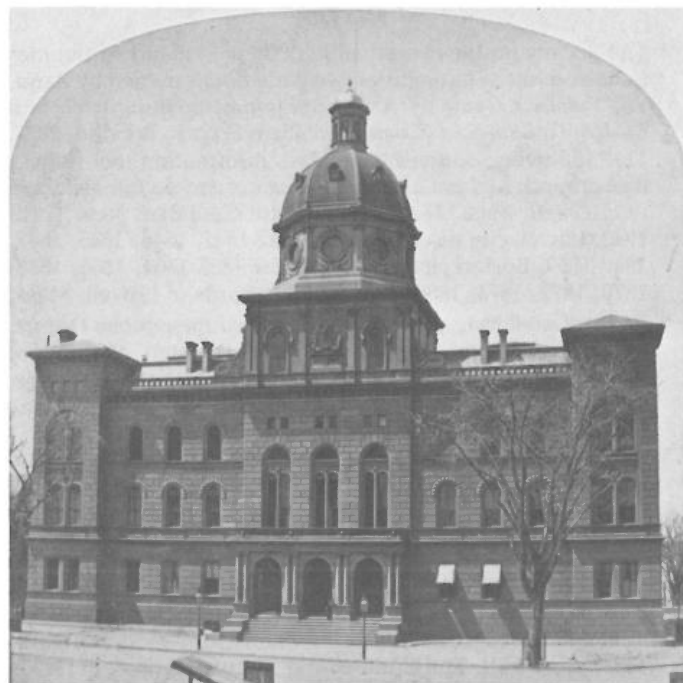


Figure 4. Portland City Hall as rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1866, c. 1870 view (MHPC).



Figure 3. The exterior shell of Portland City Hall after the Great Fire of July 4, 1866 (MHPC).

NOTES

- ¹ The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in Boston has in its archives two early books owned by Rand, *The Builder's Guide* by Asher Benjamin, Boston, 1839, and *Modern Finishings for Rooms* by William Pocock, London, 1837. The following sources provided information on Rand's background: *Mill and Mansion: A Study of Architecture and Society in Lowell, Mass. 1820-1865* by John Coolidge, New York, 1942. Lowell city directories for 1832-1842, 1844, 1845, 1847, 1849-1853; Boston city directories for 1858-1861, 1866, 1868, 1870, 1872, 1874, 1880, 1883. Vital Records of Lowell, Mass.
- ² *Report: Lowell National Historical Parks and Preservation District, Cultural Inventory*, prepared for the Division of Cultural Resources, Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, National Park Service by Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson & Abbott, Architects, Boston, 1980, pp. 106, 110.
- ³ The only Boston area commission by Rand that has been identified is the Winthrop School in Charleston (Boston Public Library Archives).
- ⁴ *Portland Advertiser*, February 1, 1858.
- ⁵ *Portland Advertiser*, February 9, 1858; March 25, 1858.
- ⁶ *Annual Reports of the Several Departments of the City Government of Portland for the Municipal Year of 1857-1858*, Portland, 1858, pp. V-VIII. The Cumberland County Registry of Deeds contains a plan of the county offices in the new city hall signed by Rand in Plan Book 2, No. 7.
- ⁷ *Portland Advertiser*, May 15, 1858; June 9, 1858.
- ⁸ A wood engraving of the city hall was published in *The Architects' and Mechanics' Journal*, New York, December 3, 1858.
- ⁹ *Portland Advertiser*, August 4, 1858.
- ¹⁰ *Gardiner Home Journal*, March 15, 1860; *Maine Farmer* (Augusta), December 6, 1860.
- ¹¹ *Portland Daily Press*, March 29, 1867.
- ¹² *Boston Post*, September 10, 1883.

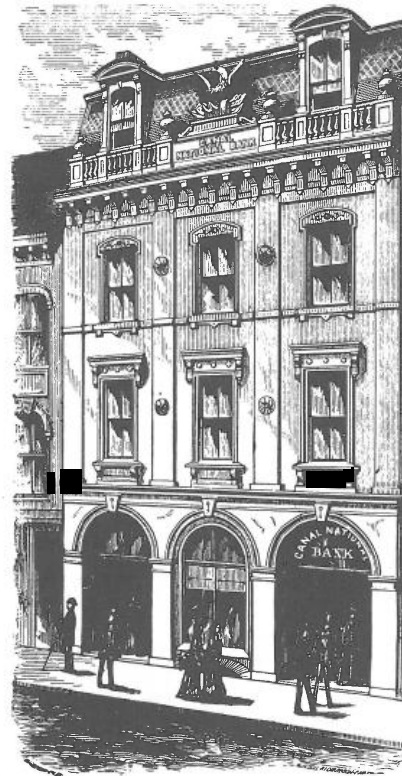


Figure 5. Canal National Bank, Portland, 1876 view (MHPC).

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY JAMES H. RAND

Portland City Hall, Portland, 1858-1860. Destroyed.
Canal National Bank, Portland, 1867. Destroyed.

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